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Economic and environmental questions: cartography

Twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, convened in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/9, was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York, from 17 to 28 January 2000.

2. The session was attended by 162 participants and observers from 52 countries, representing 18 of the 22 geographical/linguistic divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names,[1] 3 Departments of the United Nations Secretariat,[2] 1 specialized agency,[3] 1 intergovernmental agency,[4] 3 international scientific organizations,[5] 3 other organizations,[6] and 7 individual observers.

3. The agenda was prepared by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names at its nineteenth session immediately following the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York, January 1998). Agenda items were organized to facilitate the work of the Group of Experts in addressing and following up the resolutions of the Seventh and previous Conferences. The session considered the reports of linguistic/geographical divisions on their regions and on the progress being made in the standardization of geographical names since the Seventh Conference, with particular reference to implementation of Conference resolutions. In addition, papers were presented and discussion took place on particular aspects of names standardization, pertaining to multilingual areas, the development of toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors, the use of exonyms, and archiving documents from the Conferences and sessions. Six working groups reported and continued their activities in the fields of: training courses in toponymy, toponymic data files and gazetteers, toponymic terminology, romanization systems, country names, and publicity and funding. The working group on evaluation was re-established to analyse and make recommendations on the functioning of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and its sub-groups, so as to optimize the implementation of Conference resolutions.

4. From 100 documents presented as working or information papers, it was clear that considerable progress was being made in many Member States on various aspects of geographical names standardization, from field recording of locally used names, to creation of toponymic databases; dissemination of standardized names through paper gazetteers, digital files and World

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Wide Web databases; and creation of national toponymic guidelines. Working groups had also made progress in developing training materials and data exchange standards, in rationalizing differences in toponymic terminology and in the writing of country names, and in producing documentation to explain the need for geographical names standardization. Despite many accomplishments, it is also clear that the goals of standardization are not yet met throughout the world and, indeed, as technology advances, so do the needs expand for standardized geographical names for communication in different media. The Group of Experts, through its geographical/linguistic divisional structure, must still reach out to Member States that have not yet developed a process or authority responsible for standardization. Undoubtedly the World Wide Web will play an increasingly significant role, and the far-enlarged potential for public access underlines the need to have accurate and authoritative nationally standardized toponymic data for international use.

5. The proceedings of the twentieth session are to be published in one volume.

6. The present session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names ascertained that the provisional agenda and rules of procedure were in place for the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names to be held in Berlin from 27 August to 5 September 2002 (in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1998/221). The Group of Experts also prepared a provisional agenda (see annex) for a proposed twenty-first session to be held in Berlin in conjunction with the Eighth Conference. The recommendation for such a session had been endorsed by the Council for previous Conferences. The twenty-first session would allow the Group of Experts to facilitate and follow up the work of the Conference; and would consist of two individual days, immediately before and after the Conference: (a) 26 August 2002, to receive reports of working groups and to deal with organizational matters for the Eighth Conference and (b) 6 September 2002 to plan for implementation of the recommendations of the Conference and to elect officers of the Group of Experts to direct this work for the next five years.

Recommendations to the Council

7. In view of the importance of the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in supporting the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and the essential contribution it continues to provide to Member States in the geographical field and related cartographic areas, it is recommended that the Economic and Social Council:

(a) Endorse the recommendation that the twenty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names be convened for two working days (26 August and 6 September 2002) in Berlin, in conjunction with the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, to facilitate and to follow up the work of this Conference;

(b) Request the Secretary-General to take measures, as appropriate, to implement the recommendation contained in paragraph (a) above.

Notes

[1] Africa South Division, Arabic Division, Asia East Division (other than China), Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division, Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic), Baltic Division, China Division, Dutch- and German-speaking Division, East Central and South-East Europe Division, Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division, East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic), French-speaking Division, Latin America Division, Norden Division, Romano-Hellenic Division, United Kingdom Division, United States of America-Canada Division.

[2] Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Department of Public Information, Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

[3] International Maritime Organization (IMO).

[4] Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH).

[5] International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), International Cartographic Association (ICA), Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR).

[6] International Organization for Standardization (ISO), International Map Trade Association (IMTA), National Geographic Society.

Annex

Provisional agenda for the twenty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

1. Opening of the session
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Reports of the Working Groups.
4. Organizational matters concerning the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
5. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
6. Election of officers.
7. Planning for implementation of the recommendations of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
8. Working groups for future requirements.
9. Provisional agenda for the twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
10. Other business.